



*GULF OF OMAN (Jan. 23, 2016) Sailors and Marines participate in a sunrise-yoga class on the flight deck of the amphibious assault ship USS Kearsarge (LHD 3). (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Aren Everett/Released)*

## MIND & BODY: MY JOURNEY TO WELL-BEING THROUGH YOGA

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*Editor's note: September is celebrated annually as National Yoga Month! In the following blog, the author shares his experiences with yoga as a means to practice mindfulness, breath control and body awareness for personal health. It's not intended as medical advice.*

Our society is fast-paced and demanding, with smart phones that have us linked 24/7. We have instant access to vast amounts of info and are constantly bombarded with alerts, texts and e-mails at all times of the day. We have little time to just simply think and unwind. Consequently many of us are stressed, burned out and in desperate need of a break.

We can all benefit from self-care of our physical, emotional and spiritual well-being. Taking small breaks and learning to be OK without screens and without being constantly 'on' is critical to our daily and long-term health. But, what does that look like? How do we make time for ourselves?

The answer is different for everyone, but I discovered, mostly by accident, that yoga had a calming influence on my mind and body. Of course, this wasn't my goal starting. I stumbled upon these benefits by accident.

I attended my first class because I was injured. For me, it was from many years of running without much thought to stretching or body imbalances. I had gone through two rounds of physical therapy for tendonitis and was looking at surgery for planter fasciitis. At many points, my doctor and physical therapist had urged me to try yoga or to at least stretch a lot more.

So I reluctantly went to a class taught by a co-worker. It wasn't an epiphany moment or anything as the poses (called asanas) were unknown to me, and I couldn't really get into many of them since my body was so tight. But my body felt good and I got a much needed full-body stretch.

I kept going, not regularly at first, but enough to realize it was making a difference. I could touch my toes without pain and I discovered muscles long neglected that seemed to help me in running and everyday life.



*The author. (Photo courtesy of Ed Gulick)*

What I never anticipated was the deeper mind-body connection I experienced. I learned body type and ability doesn't matter. Flexibility comes slowly with practice; simply respect your body as it is and work with it (not against it), and you make progress.

The greatest benefit I learned was how to turn my attention inward and be OK with just breathing and being mentally present. In yoga they call it quieting the mind. I learned how to take an hour and forget screens, work and family demands, the craziness of society and all its entertainment and distractions and to simply be thankful for who I am and all that I have. It's been an amazing journey that continues to change as my practice deepens.

Of course, this is my journey. Yours won't be the same, but the goal of self-care is attainable for all who are willing to start the journey and follow what they find most beneficial. Yes, it feels odd, even goofy at times, but once you get past that, the benefits are tremendous. You just need to start.